

Centro Studi Difesa Civile - CSDC
Civilian Defence Research Centre

Civilian Defence
and the White Helmets project.
Unarmed civilian peacekeepers.

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We anticipate hereby the index and the summary to inform you of the direction in which we are working and to consider together how to go on at a European level to obtain political support and funds for research, the training of civilian peace operators and the concrete organization of the Civil Peace Corps.

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INDEX

PREFACE

- ◆ Introductory remarks and thanks
- ◆ Re-motivating young people to defence
- ◆ The Italian Constitution, democracy and defence
- ◆ The risk of expansionism and the elaboration of destructiveness

INTRODUCTION

- ❖ The link between security, defence and conflict management
- ❖ The universal nature of conflict, different modalities for its resolution
- ❖ "Identity" conflicts after the end of the cold war
- ❖ Defining internationally relevant conflicts
- ❖ A new way to interpret conflict
- ❖ The problematic link between conflict management, security and defence
- ❖ Re-defining the security-defence-conflict management triangle
- ❖ Towards a re-definition of the concept of defence
- ❖ The role of civil defence
- ❖ Methods of civilian intervention in intrastate conflicts
- ❖ The civilian Peace Corps - White Helmets

CHAPTER 1. PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND SOLUTION OF CONFLICTS

- 1.1. An analytical approach: escalation phases in international conflict
- 1.2. Civil intervention and social structure in the conflicting parts
- 1.3. A complete overview of external intervention activity in conflict situations
- 1.4. Activities addressed to the population and to local and middle manager
- 1.5. Action for the protection of human rights
- 1.6. Prevention activities in the phase of latent conflict
- 1.7. Activity in the phase of polarisation
- 1.8. Activity during the phase of violent warfare
- 1.9. Reconstruction

CHAPTER 2. CIVILIAN DEFENCE

- 2.1. Beyond deterrence: a defence strategy for the atomic age
 - 2.1.1. The return to Clausewitz. The necessity of strategic thought
 - 2.1.2. The indirect approach of Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart
- 2.2. Definition, principles and techniques of Civil Defence
 - 2.2.1. Definition
 - 2.2.2. The development of communication
 - 2.2.3. Subjective aspects: perception of the threat, image of the enemy and interior strength
 - 2.2.4. Defensive action and risk to life
 - 2.2.5. The development of democratic qualities
 - 2.2.6. Techniques of action
- 2.3. Historical experiences
- 2.4. The development of studies
 - 2.4.1. Introduction
 - 2.4.2. An overview of research in the 1960's and 1970's
 - 2.4.3. Research in the 1980's
 - 2.4.3.1. Transarmament and the proposal to integrate civil defence and conventional defence
 - 2.4.3.2. Non-armed defence and defensive defence
 - 2.4.3.3. Civil defence and non-violent defence
 - 2.4.3.4. The invulnerability of a Nation in relation to development and environmental issues
 - 2.4.3.5. Mutual defensive superiority versus "mutual assured destruction" (M.A.D.)
 - 2.4.4. The '90s: from civil defence to civil intervention in international conflicts

CHAPTER 3. CIVILIAN PEACE CORPS - WHITE HELMETS

- 3.1. The White helmets in United Nations, European Parliament and Italian Parliament documents
 - 3.1.1. Introduction
 - 3.1.2. The White helmets in U.N. documents
 - 3.1.3. The European Civilian Peace Corps
 - 3.1.4. The recommendations made by the Italian Parliament
 - 3.1.5. The White Helmet figure
- 3.2. Legal background of the White Helmets
 - 3.2.1. Introduction
 - 3.2.2. International law background
 - 3.2.3. National law background
 - 3.2.4. Conclusions
- 3.3. Italian experiences of activity in several countries
 - 3.3.1. Introduction
 - 3.3.2. Emergency aid
 - 3.3.3. Basic peace-building and peace-keeping
 - 3.3.4. Intermediate peace-building and peace-keeping
 - 3.3.5. Conclusions
- 3.4. Organisational aspects of Civilian Peace Corps - White Helmets
 - 3.4.1. Introduction
 - 3.4.2. Functions and tasks
 - 3.4.2.1. Areas of United Nations intervention
 - 3.4.2.2. White Helmets' functions according to the U.N. Secretary General
 - 3.4.3. Principles of intervention
 - 3.4.4. Organisational layout
 - 3.4.5. The legal status of the White Helmets
 - 3.4.6. Research activities
- 3.5. The White Helmets in peace-keeping operations and in humanitarian assistance interventions
 - 3.5.1. Peace support operations
 - 3.5.2. Peace-keeping operations
 - 3.5.3. Operational aspects of Civilian Peace Corps - White Helmets
 - 3.5.4. Features of a White Helmets team within a peace-keeping operation
 - 3.5.5. Typology of mandate
 - 3.5.6. Co-ordinating relationships with the other components of the operation
 - 3.5.7. Relations with bodies not related to the personnel employed in the operations
 - 3.5.8. Propaedeutical training activities
 - 3.5.9. Logistic aspects
 - 3.5.10. Typologies of intervention
 - 3.5.11. Discipline and behaviour
 - 3.5.12. The non-use of strength
 - 3.5.13. Management of accidents
 - 3.5.14. Humanitarian assistance interventions. Features and typologies of intervention

CHAPTER 4. TRAINING THE WHITE HELMETS FOR INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCIES

- 4.1. The U.N. Secretary General's report
- 4.2. Training for preventing / solving conflicts, for creating conditions of dialogue (confidence - building) and democracy (democracy - building)
 - 4.2.1. Experiences to be referred to
 - 4.2.2. Training methodologies and aims
 - 4.2.3. The selection and consideration of personal and group dynamics

CONCLUSIONS

ABSTRACT

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ABSTRACT

From Civilian Based Defence to the Civil Peace Corps – the White Helmets.

In the future, the security of the “Italy system” will only be possible if inserted in a global and multidimensional security project.

This research explores both the civil tools used in the prevention, management and resolution of international conflicts, and the operational means establishing cooperation between the complementary military and civilian structures.

The authors of this survey have considered the strategies of civilian and defensive defence, which represent a also represent a point of reference for a large part of those young people who opt for the civil and social services established by Law no. 230/98.

The considerations, proposals and experiences presented in this paper are part of that wide, civil and non-violent cultural flow, which has chosen to cope with the danger of the means of mass-destruction and nuclear strategy. Civilian based defence lies on two scientific assumptions:

1. The defensive capacity of a people is something other than its destructive power.
2. The defence of political and civil institutions in a complex modern democracy is more important than the simple defence of territory.

The above mentioned law now allows conscientious objectors and non-violent civil society to end the phase of opposition to the Defence Institutions and to begin a new phase of collaboration through programmes aimed at implementing the security level of our country, starting with joint intervention in international crisis and emergencies.

The consideration of and the relationship between military institutions and the use of force have also changed. Today almost nobody in the field of peace research contests the fundamental role of the control of violence by armed forces in the theatre of war.

Therefore we have focused on a particular instrument - the Civilian Peace Corps -The White Helmets - which can be used both in the distribution of humanitarian and technical aid and in the management of social tension as a third party in international conflict.

These contingents are one of the diverse instruments through which cooperation between civilian and military, government and non government organisations can be realised in political interventions abroad.

From a cultural and operational point of view, the proposal is in accordance with Article 52 of the Italian Constitution, as it represents an enhancement of the dissuasive capacity of Italy towards potential aggressors. This includes:

- the re-motivation of young people to participate in the multidimensional defence of their country;
- the active participation of citizens in national defence;
- the consolidation of civil society;
- the development of specific civil defence techniques, organization and training arrangements.

The development of a civilian corps in conflict management can help to overcome the dilemma between issues of human rights protection and the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Indeed the suggested instruments undermine those principles to a lesser extent than military intervention.

To send into the field civilian and military peace operators, experts in humanitarian aid, mediation, negotiation, community development, human rights, electoral processes, democracy and confidence building, can be a safe and reassuring option for international diplomatic balances, a resource to be prepared and kept ready.

In Italy several NGOs and associations are already working in this direction, mostly - but not only - in the nearby Balkans. These activities would have a broader impact if their value was appropriately supported by government institutions. Civilian intervention in conflict prevention and transformation has shown in several situations their potential to reduce tension and start negotiation processes.

The experience consolidated in these years by those volunteers who have dealt with the problems arising in some countries from wars or humanitarian emergencies represents a significant basis, from both a qualitative and quantitative point of view, which is moreover enhanced by the volunteers' skills in listening, mediation and confidence-building. Besides, Italy's capacity to cope with humanitarian emergencies is internationally recognised (with regard to this, the distribution of aid and the management of refugees flows are significant examples).

This capacity of the Italian civil society corresponds to the requirements of the U.N.

There is a solid legal background in Italy that allows civil volunteers to cover the whole range of functions assigned to the White Helmets by international organisations. It has to be underlined that the Italian strength consists of the possible involvement of all those who have opted for the civil service, which is an alternative to the military service, conscientious objectors, voluntary and professional volunteers, men and women, whatever their original organisation and personal experience may be, including previous military activity.

The tools identified in this research are flexible so as to be adapted to all phases of the escalation of conflict:

- in the early phase, from latent conflict to political crisis;
- in the period of polarisation and confrontation;
- in times of violent confrontation;
- in post-war reconciliation and reconstruction.

A development of foreign and defence policy in the above mentioned direction is not only based on values of non violent conflict resolution. In the "world system", to ensure peace and the protection of human rights in the face of menace and military violence implies an imperial risk which is not in accordance with the Italian Constitution (in particular with Article 11) or with the U.N. Charter. On the other hand, no state at the moment has either the political will nor the military capacity to resolve all world conflict by military means.

To ensure the multidimensional security of the country and manage violence through tools and intervention strategies and ensure is in line with the general objective of reducing the disasters and preventing the repetition of the genocide of the past century. Therefore the evolution of defence and military strategies undertaken in this direction by the Italian Armed Forces and by civil society has to be followed in line with the peace loving tradition expressed in our Constitution.